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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S TRIP TO PUERTO PRINCESA HIGHLIGHTS POLICE
COOPERATION, ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

¶1. SUMMARY: An August 24, 2009, trip by the Ambassador to Puerto Princesa City in the island province of Palawan emphasized U.S. support for education, regional and local law enforcement concerns, and the environment. The Ambassador visited a school supported by the Peace Corps, attended a building dedication ceremony for the Philippine National Police Special Boat Unit's new headquarters, and participated in a roundtable discussion on the live reef fish trade in Palawan. At each of the events, she was able to emphasize the benefits of cooperation between the people of the U.S. and the Philippines. END SUMMARY.

TAW KABUI SCHOOL FOR A CHILD

¶2. The Ambassador first visited Taw Kabui School for a Child, a school for children with special needs located in Barangay Tagburos in Puerto Princesa City. A Peace Corps Volunteer based in Puerto Princesa helps with physical education classes at the school, has conducted several training sessions and workshops, and assisted in the construction of the school's resource center. A Peace Corps Response Volunteer has also been recently assigned to the school and will help to develop the staff's teaching skills. During her tour of the school, the only such facility in Palawan, the Ambassador observed several classroom sessions, interacted with the children and teachers, and discussed the challenges and rewards of working with special needs children with the school administrators. In a brief statement to the staff and students, she emphasized the positive impact of the partnership between the Peace Corps and Taw Kabui, and praised their efforts to improve the lives of the children with special needs in Puerto Princesa.

PNP SPECIAL BOAT UNIT DEDICATION CEREMONY

¶3. In 2006, Embassy Manila partnered with the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the City of Puerto Princesa to fund a project to develop a small maritime law enforcement unit with intercept capability. The unit, the Maritime Group Special Boat Unit, is based in Puerto Princesa and will be deployed in the southwestern Philippines in the region between Palawan and Mindanao. It will coordinate with both the existing Special Boat Unit of the Indonesian Polisi Perairan as well as the Royal Malaysian Marine Police, and will carry out maritime surveillance and response operations, seaborne law enforcement and interdiction, surface and subsurface rescue operations, and maritime forensic investigations. The project includes the recruitment and training of personnel, the construction of a headquarters building for the Special Boat Unit in Palawan, and the purchase of four patrol boats.

¶4. The Ambassador participated in the official turnover and opening ceremony for the Special Boat Unit headquarters building during her August 24 visit. The ceremony included a ribbon-cutting, signing of the deed of donation of the Special Boat Unit building, and remarks by Chief of the Philippine Police General Jesus A. Versoza and the Ambassador. General Versoza highlighted the benefits to the economy

that enhanced sea-lane security provided, while the Ambassador noted the success of the partnership between the U.S. Embassy and the PNP, and praised the increased capacity of the PNP in the fight against crime, terrorism, human trafficking, and environmental pollution.

LIVE REEF FISH TRADE DISCUSSION

15. A discussion on the live reef fish trade concluded the day's activities. Hosted by the World Wildlife Foundation ? Philippines (WWF), participants included Lory Tan of WWF, Edward Hagedorn, Mayor of Puerto Princesa City, Roberto Rodriguez, Mayor of Taytay City in Northern Palawan, Palawan Live Fish Trade Association President Dennis Dela Cuesta, John Pontillas of the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, as well as the Ambassador and USAID's officer in charge of the Office of Energy and Environment. The discussion took place while cruising on Puerto Princesa Bay aboard the MV Navorca, a boat owned and operated by WWF.

16. The live reef fish trade is important to the Philippines and the Coral Triangle region. The U.S. Government supports live reef fish trade through the Coral Triangle Initiative, a multilateral partnership among the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor Leste to safeguard the natural coastal and fishery resources in the region. The live reef fish trade contributes \$26 million to Philippine economy annually; about 60% of the supply is sourced from Palawan, and the industry is a major source of income for its residents. The industry in its current state is not sustainable, however, as overfishing and illegal fishing methods, such as cyanide use, have depleted fish populations and damaged the environment.

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17. The day's discussion focused on the range of management actions that could be taken to respond to declining live reef fish trade. The options that were discussed included a complete fishing ban as mandated by the city of Puerto Princesa, regulation of the trade through a quota system as advocated by the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development and the Provincial government, and sustainable fishery management at the source level as attempted in the Taytay area. The participants were in agreement that the live reef fish trade must be managed better in order to provide a sustainable income for fishermen and traders of Palawan, and provided a variety of viewpoints on the best way to accomplish this goal. The discussion demonstrated that stakeholders cannot move forward with the management of the live reef fish trade if they do not collaborate, and that a range of management actions will be needed to address the issue.

KENNEY